DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 189 504 CG 014 529

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TITLE Beginning Counseling Students and Moral Judgment.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 19p.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Blacks: *Counselor Training: *Developmental Stages: Empathy: *Females: Graduate Students: Higher Education: *Moral Development: Moral Values
IDENTIFIERS *Defining Issues Test

ABSTRACT

Kohlberg's (1969) six stages of moral development are grouped into three levels of two stages each: (1) preconventional (morality is externally controlled): (2) conventional (doing the right thing and respecting authority): and (3) postconventional (principles of morality are to be applied universally). Rest (1974) typifies these stages in the Defining Issues Test (DIT) which was administered to 13 black, southern females beginning their Master's training in counseling. Two subjects could not be typed. Six could be assigned to a specific stage by exceptional usage of that stage: two preconventional (Stage 2), two conventional (Stage 4), and two postconventional (Stages 5B and 6). The other five subjects were classified as: one with Stage 2, Stage 4 subdominant: two with Stage 4, Stage 2 subdominant: and two with Stage 4, "A" subdominant (antiestablishment orientation). There is a preponderance of Stage 4 moral thinking in this group. Counselor education programs must include discussions of moral dilemmas in an attempt to raise counselors' levels of moral judgment, and the effects of training programs on trainees' moral development must be investigated. (NRB)

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Beginning Counseling Students and Moral Judgment

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Beginning Counseling Students and Moral Judgment

Counselors often find themselves making ethical and moral decisions as they discharge their responsibilities and fulfill their obligations to their clients and society. Many different loyalties must be reconciled between the institutions they serve and themselves. In any setting and with any population complex issues emerge concerning confidentiality, consultation, and provisions for referral. Counselors need a framework of values to resolve these conflicts (Wrenn, 1952).

The good counselor-client relationship depends upon the counselor helping the client make successful choices. It is difficult to give this help if the counselor is not a fully functioning person who can make decisions based upon ethical considerations. In order to help clients develop a system of values, counselors must thoroughly examine the values by which they themselves live (Graham, 1975; Stude & McKelvey, 1979; Wrenn, 1952). This is a critical factor in the helping relationship. How the counselor is perceived as making value judgments has a profound effect upon those who come for help (Green, 1979; Smith & Peterson, 1977). This is as true today as it was in the past.

Crises in Moral Reasoning

The seventies contained the well documented national crisis which showed us that some men in the highest eschelons of power and in whom we had placed an inordinate amount of

trust, believed that any means justified the end. Rapid changes in life-styles occurred with the new morality and the autonomy given us by the right to abortion and live-in roommates of the opposite sex. A highly controversial and unpopular war in a far off place finally came to an end. An amendment to our constitution called "equal rights" had yet to be passed by the required number of states. A religious-political leader named Khomeini sanctioned the taking and keeping hostage of our countrymen. The prevalent feeling was that our lives were controlled by persons who had different values than our own. The uncertainty of the times brought increased awareness that made us question the prevailing social, economic, and political systems. This questioning led to the knowledge that it is people, not systems, who make value or moral judgments, which in turn lead to the actions which affect our lives.

The beginning of the decade of the eighties brings with it hope and uncertainty. World problems are national problems and are therefore personal problems. Perhaps now is the time to re-examine the ways in which moral judgments are made and to take a look at one group of people who are being trained as helpers to others in clarifying values and in choosing from among various alternatives.

It was from this frame of reference that this line of inquiry proceeded. What are the levels of value judgment functioning for a select group of beginning counseling

students? When ethical conflicts arise, the counselor makes judgments based on his/her own value system. "Values enter deeply into the field of ethics, for ethical principles in any field are based upon the value system of that field of endeavor" (Wrenn, 1952, p. 175).

The focus of this study was to determine the stages of moral development of a selected group of beginning counseling students. Their selection was based on the fact that this was their first counseling course. Although a pre-post design was beyond the scope of this survey, the purpose was to know where the students were prior to counselor training so that some opinions could be formed by educators as to where they should be after finishing the counseling program.

Stages of Moral Development

Theories have been presented to explain how man grows physically and psychologically. Those which appear to be more empirically based are those which show development in stages. Erik Erikson's stages of personality development and Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development show a growth process of evolution from a previous, lower stage to a later more complex, integrated one. Progression occurs in invariant sequence as one interacts with the environment. Piaget (1948) stated that moral development also followed sequential, hierarchal steps similar to his well known stages of cognitive development. A person's obtainment of the next higher stage was dependent upon acquisition of the skills of the lower stages.

Using the Piagetian concept, Lawrence Kohlberg conducted a series of structured studies in places such as the United States, Turkey, Taiwan, Yucatan, and Mexico to determine the viability of the theory. He found that the development of moral judgment is present in the same form and sequence in all cultures studied so far. Cultural interaction can speed up or retard development along the sequence, however, it does not appear to affect the existence or order of the sequence (Kohlberg, 1964).

Kohlberg defines morality as conscience, which causes us to make judgments based on a set of rules of social action which has been internalized (Kohlberg, 1964, 1969, 1974). It is the form of reasoning used to settle claims among persons in moral situations. Moral development is the increase of such internalization over time. Internalization can be determined by: (a) behavior - observing the person's resistance to breaking a rule, even when he knows he won't be caught, (b) emotion - if the person has feelings of guilt or anxiety over breaking a rule, and (c) judgment - if the person can make decisions and judgments according to internal standards and justify these judgments to self and others.

The oral procedure Kohlberg developed attempts to measure the stages of moral judgment by having the subject respond spontaneously to a situation. A story, involving a moral dilemma, is told to the subject who makes a decision about the issue and explains why he chose that particular

solution. In this open ended scheme, whether something is "right" or "wrong" is not significant. Only the reasoning used by the person to arrive at the conclusion is important.

There are three levels to moral thinking with each level subdivided into two stages (Kohlberg, 1969; Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1974). These levels serve as the basis for moral judgment. They are: (a) Preconventional - morality is externally controlled, (b) Conventional - doing the right thing, having respect for authority, (c) Postconventional - principles of morality are to be applied universally.

The specific, sequential stages of moral growth that Kohlberg outlined are:

Preconventional

Stage 1. The person thinks that physical punishment is the consequence of one's own misdeeds or of breaking the rules. An act is only as bad as the damages done. Physical punishment will be administered by a stronger, superior power.

Stage 2. The person is materialistic and acts to satisfy his/her own personal needs. The desire is to avoid trouble and if misdeeds are done, don't get caught. Motivation is to act in an acceptable manner and to co-exist peacefully with others.

Conventional

Stage 3. The intention of one's action is more important than the specific act. Things are either

black or white, right or wrong. There is respect for authority and a need to please others with one's action.

Stage 4. The rules are fixed and unchanging. Everyone must obey and follow the rules. Law and order dominate this stage. The social order must be maintained for its own sake.

Postconventional

Stage 5. Independent moral judgments can be made. There is an awareness that there is an arbitrary element in rule-making, and that the will of the majority has some credence. Respect for the rights of others is evident. Built into the rules is the possibility of change.

Stage 6. The idea of justice is complex and there are no easy solutions. Decisions are made according to general ethical principles and one's own conscience. The concept of justice is universal and includes all mankind.

The content of the six stages was postulated after analyzing the responses people gave when presented with moral dilemmas which did not lend themselves to simple, correct solutions. It was the reasoning that people gave for the decisions they made which determined their level and stage of moral judgment.

According to Piaget and Kohlberg moral development moves from lower to higher stages with no stages skipped. Acquisition of a new stage does not mean that one continues to operate in the exited stage plus the new one, but rather it signifies a complete re-ordering of thinking into a new mode. Lower stages are continually incorporated into the newer mode of thinking. The rationale for thinking in the previous stage is understood by the person, but it is no longer the preferred stage. Preference is given to the stage just above the one in which the person is presently operating (Rest, 1973; Rest, Turiel, & Kohlberg, 1969; Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1974).

Developmental theory holds that Stage 3 and Stage 4 are reached by late adolescence, although many adults never operate beyond these levels. It appears that stabilization occurs in late adolescence and early adulthood. Few people advance to Stage 6 to join other identified high moral thinkers such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Socrates (Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1974). Many studies have been done which lend support to the content of Kohlberg's stages and their sequential nature (Lawrence, 1977; Rest, 1973, 1974; Rest, Turiel, & Kohlberg, 1969; Rest et al., 1977).

Taking the same theoretical approach as Kohlberg, James Rest developed an objective, paper and pencil test of moral judgment development called the Defining Issues Test (D.I.T.). It is based upon a recognition of stage structures rather than creating them spontaneously as in Kohlberg's method of

measurement. Replicated research studies using thousands of subjects have shown great promise of the validity of this objective measure. Each of the twelve issue statements accompanying the six stories of the D.I.T. was designed to typify one of the stages of moral development espoused by Kohlberg. Rest omitted the first stage and subdivided the higher stages into 5A, "the morality of social contract", 5B, "the morality of intuitive humanism", and 6, "the morality of principles of ideal social cooperation" (Rest, 1974, p. 4-3).

Procedure

During the fall semester of 1978, the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1974) was administered to 13 subjects taking a graduate course in Counseling Theories and Techniques. They were black, southern females attending a predominately black, southern university. Their ages ranged from 22 to 39 years. Their backgrounds were a potpourri of undergraduate majors: Business Administration, Health Education, English, Psychology, Sociology, Guidance and Counseling, Criminal Justice, Political Science, Nursing, Business Education, History, and Behavioral Science. This was the first course in which they had enrolled to begin their study for a Master's degree in Counseling. After acquiring this degree they would find jobs in schools, social service agencies, college counseling and career placement centers. The D.I.T. was administered during the first class period of the first semester of their graduate work.

The subjects were told that their opinions were being asked as they responded to six conflict situations or moral

dilemmas they would read. It was explained to them that there were neither right nor wrong answers and that they were to respond to the issue statements according to their own convictions.

After reading the story and placing themselves as the central character in the situation, the subjects showed the major decision they had made by checking one of three blanks. Should a certain course of action be followed, not followed, or were they undecided? Twelve statements about each story were read and rated individually as to their relative importance to the issue. Each statement had five choices ranging from "great importance" to "no importance". The final activity involved choosing the four most important statements from the set of twelve and ranking them from first to fourth choice.

One story, as an example, had euthanasia for its theme. A patient, painfully ill with a terminal disease, asks the doctor to speed inevitable death. What should the doctor do? A Stage 2 consideration would be whether the doctor could make the death appear like an accident. A Stage 6 statement, on the other hand, wonders if helping to end another's life is ever a responsible act.

Scoring was accomplished by assigning weights of 4, 3, 2, and 1 to the four rankings. These weighted scores were then placed in the appropriate stages for each of the six stories. The weighted scores were added resulting in totals across stages for all stories.

Results

Stage scores reflect the relative importance a subject gives to the moral judgments of that stage relative to a norm group of individuals. A score equal to or above 1.00 on any stage means the subject used that stage's reasoning at least one standard deviation more often than the norm group of high school juniors, seniors, college and graduate students used by Rest in the original sample (Rest, 1974). If more than one score was above 1.00, the highest number was considered the predominant stage score and the other(s), the subdominant stage(s) score (see Table 1).

Two of the thirteen subjects could not be typed, that is, they did not endorse one particular stage's thinking to the extent that it was one standard deviation above the norm group's usage. Their scores ranged over the entire series of stages. This is consistent with prior research which found that 10% to 20% of any sample would be non-types (Rest, 1974).

Six of the subjects could be assigned to a specific stage of moral development based on their exceptional usage of a particular stage. Of this group, two showed moral thinking on a postconventional level; one Stage 6 - decisions made in terms of general ethical principles, and one 5B - the morality of intuitive humanism. Two other subjects interpreted the moral situations on a conventional level at Stage 4 - respect for authority and maintaining the social order for its own sake. The last two in this group demonstrated moral thinking

of the preconventional level when presented with the particular dilemmas of the D.I.T. These subjects could be classified as Stage 2 types who chose issue statements which sought to avoid trouble, act in an acceptable manner, and co-exist peacefully with others.

The remaining five subjects had two high scores. They were typed by the highest score based on the exceptional degree of importance they gave to the issues of that stage, with the next highest stage score one standard deviation above the mean as the subdominant stage. The results were: one subject, Stage 2 with Stage 4 subdominant; two subjects, Stage 4 with Stage 2 subdominant; and two subjects, Stage 4 with "A" subdominant.

A word about the meaning of "A" in the D.I.T. is necessary. "The 'A' items are intended to typify an antiestablishment orientation, a point of view which condemns tradition and the existing social order for its arbitrariness or its corruption by the rich for the exploitation of the poor" (Rest, 1974, p. 4-3). Preliminary evidence suggests that the issue statements which fall into this category could show the subject moving from Stage 4 to Stage 5 and therefore would demonstrate Stage 4½ moral thinking.

Discussion

The wide range of stages of moral growth which these graduate counseling students exhibited is not surprising if one accepts the concept of a developmental theory and

appreciates the importance of environmental influences on development. The students had in common race, sex, and general cultural-geographical rearing practices. Major differences were most evident in their chronological ages and in the variety of undergraduate majors.

There appears to be a preponderance of Stage 4 moral thinking among this group of thirteen (as it is in the general population). Over half of the subjects were assigned to this stage primarily, or as a second choice. Two were typed at Stage 4 only. Four were typed Stage 4 principally, with another stage being subdominant. Another one had major thinking at one stage with Stage 4 as the subdominant one. It can be said that these students were operating at the level of conventional morality as evidenced by their choices of issue statements on the D.I.T.

The three who made exceptional usage of the judgment associated with Stage 2 and the two for whom it was a subdominant stage also deserve careful notice. The acquiescence, deference to power, and concept of externally controlling factors associated with this stage call for a more in-depth analysis of possible conditions which would lead to this preconventional level of moral judgments for these subjects.

This study presupposes that these subjects were similar in age and prior undergraduate disciplines to other beginning counseling students in other counselor education programs throughout the country. Their major differences were sex,

race, and geographic location. It would be interesting to determine the levels of moral development of counseling students in other programs in other parts of the country.

It is not known if moral reasoning can and does change in adults. The research done by Kohlberg and others leads us to believe that this type of development is complete by late adolescence or early adulthood. Yet counselors believe to the core of their beings that people can and do change; with help and with the willingness to change. However, there is something more needed here--a change in some part of the environment. If the training which counselors receive is to have real meaning as to make them persons who are more open, more honest, and more understanding of others, then this aspect cannot be left to chance. Open discussions of relevant moral dilemmas in a learning environment could possibly lead to an increase in the level of moral judgment. No matter how glib the students are in regurgitating the appropriate theories, no matter how skillfully they learn the high responses on the continuum of the core dimensions of facilitative counseling, it will have little meaning to the broader society if they remain people who still believe it's all okay so long as you don't get caught with your hand in the cookie jar. Inherent in the theory of moral development is the implication of social responsibility.

Discussions of moral dilemmas lend themselves readily to the course content in counselor education programs. These

discussions could also take place in the training of peer counselors and counseling paraprofessionals. The focus of all these programs is to develop empathic persons who can perceive and experience a variety of points of view. These discussions hold promise for moral growth. It would be worthwhile to find out if training programs do influence the moral development of the trainees. Perhaps a more essential question would be, should they. If the lessons of the past are to be learned, perhaps they should.

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Table 1

Distribution of Dominant Stage Types

Subjects	Stages						
	2	3	4	A	5A	5B	6
1							x*
2						x	
3			x				
4			x				
5	x						
6	x						
7	x+**		x-***				
8	x-		x+				
9	x-		x+				
10			x+	x-			
11			x+	x-			
12	non-type						
13	non-type						

*x = stage type

**x+ = predominant stage type

***x- = subdominant stage type